



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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Georgia Parham (202) 208-5634

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION SOUGHT ON PROPOSAL TO RECLASSIFY SOME AFRICAN ELEPHANT POPULATIONS

The Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is reopening the public comment period on a 1991 proposal to reclassify some populations of the African elephant from threatened to endangered. Comments will be accepted through April 20, 1992. Also, the deadline for a final decision on the proposed reclassification has been administratively extended until September 18, 1992.

Service Director John Turner said his agency is seeking more information on its March 1991 proposal to reclassify the status of African elephants from threatened to endangered under the Endangered Species Act, except for populations in Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. All African elephant populations are currently listed as threatened.

The additional comment period will also allow the Service to consider new information, including a special report presented by a panel of international elephant experts during a recent Conference of Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) held in Kyoto, Japan.

"As with every endangered species decision, we need to consider all available scientific information to ensure the final rule on the African elephant accurately reflects its status," Turner said. "Reopening the comment period will allow us to take into account important new information on elephant management brought to CITES by experts from around the world."

The status of the African elephant was a major topic of discussion during the conference, as delegates debated proposals to ease restrictions on commerce in elephant hides and meat while
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retaining the ban on ivory trade. The proposals, put forth by the southern African countries with healthy elephant populations, were eventually withdrawn. The African elephant remains a CITES Appendix I species, which eliminates all commercial trade.

The conference was attended by delegates of the 113 member nations of CITES. CITES is the world's most widely accepted conservation agreement, with signatories working together to regulate commerce in wild plants and animals affected by international trade.

Important new -- and sometimes conflicting -- information on elephant biology and management was presented at the conference. Experts from countries with elephant populations and from non-governmental organizations offered differing opinions on threats facing the elephant. This led the Service to extend its deadline on a final decision on reclassification, which was due this month. The Endangered Species Act provides for a 6-month extension for a final rule when substantial scientific disagreement exists on sufficiency or the accuracy of data pertaining to a proposed reclassification.

The Service's proposal to reclassify elephant populations does not include Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe because elephant populations there are managed under effective conservation programs and their numbers are stable or increasing.

Endangered species, under the Act, are those plants and animals in danger of becoming extinct throughout all or a significant portion of their range, while threatened species are those likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future.

Under the proposal for endangered populations, permits would be available only for scientific purposes and/or to enhance the propagation or survival of the species. For threatened populations, permits would additionally be available for zoological exhibition, and for educational or certain other purposes consistent with the Endangered Species Act, including importation of sport-hunted trophies under carefully controlled conditions. The current ban on importation of African elephant ivory would continue.

Comments on the proposed reclassification should be directed to the Office of Scientific Authority, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Dr., Room 725, Arlington, VA 22203.